

Winter is for chatting and mending

THE Cape's winters are notorious for their cold and stormy conditions, and are hardly the right time for yachting. Most cruising yachts spend this time of year securely tied up at their moorings.

There are, of course, hardy souls who actually choose to go out there and face the cold and wet of winter sailing, but for those sailors who are more sane, winter can be a constructive time. There is always work to be done to keep a boat and its equipment and sails in good shape.

This is a good time for boat owners to have their motors serviced and to send their sails to sail lofts for inspection and repairs. Conditions are tough at sea, and the combination of weather and salt air takes its toll. Yacht equipment is very expensive and must be looked after. Contrary to popular belief, very few yachties are millionaires.

Winter is also a time for learning, often just by talking to other yachties and sharing their experiences. I spent a most instructive evening this week discussing

and deciding whether we had handled them in the best possible manner. We discussed wave heights and driving rain and wind, we went into details about near-collisions with passing ships.

One friend who had been a diver on a drilling platform in the North Sea told stories of giant waves and fierce gales that made me shiver with fright.

Winter yachting talk tends to revolve round the pain and agony of life at sea, rather than the joys of sailing. Somehow the seasons always dictate the tone of talk.

WINTER gives us plenty of time to think, and to work out our own heavy-weather tactics. We're usually too busy enjoying our sailing in summer to spend many hours just talking. But should the time arrive for emergency action, it's good to know that we've thought out our plans well in advance.

This weekend will naturally find many sailors discussing the fate of Cape Yachtsman Petr Muzik, whose yacht, Shoestring went aground on the Natal



His friends back in the warmth and safety of the yacht club bar will be asking whether he should have ventured out with only one crew member at this time of the year? What could he have done to avoid having to stay at the helm for a gruelling 35 hours? Would it have been possible for him to head out to the relative safety of the open sea? Or to make for a port?

We hope that we'll all learn something from his misfortune. The good news is that he and his crew member are alive and safe.